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RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0728
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0145
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0782
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0056
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 0105
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 0027
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 0041
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 0066
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 0379
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC//DHO-2/REA/NMJIC-J2//
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000460

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (PERRY)

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: LTG WHITCOMB VISIT TO TURKMENISTAN, 24-25 APRIL

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Jennifer L. Brush and LTC James F. Zink, Defense and Army Attache, E.O. 12958, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Commander, ARCENT was cordially received in meetings with Turkmenistan's Deputy Defense Minister and Deputy Foreign Minister on April 25, 2007. The Deputy Defense Minister characterized current military cooperation with the United States as 'good,' especially in the areas of humanitarian support for Afghanistan and CENTCOM's military contact plan, and was certain bilateral military cooperation would broaden in the future. The Deputy Foreign Minister stated Turkmenistan valued its relationship with the United States, as demonstrated by the posting of a defense attaché to Washington, and that this visit was a good opportunity to discuss various aspects of our bilateral cooperation. Both Turkmenistan officials expressed interest in the current situation in Afghanistan. End Summary.

MINISTRY OF DEFENSE

2. (C) Reading from a one-page prepared script, Deputy Defense Minister for Armaments COL Guchmyrat Ashyrov welcomed LTG Whitcomb to Turkmenistan and apologized for the absence of the defense minister and first deputy minister. (Comment: Defense Minister GEN Mammetgeldiyev had not yet returned from the short-notice trip to Moscow and acting Chief of the General Staff COL Atabayev was at the U.S.-funded Multilateral Planners Conference V in South Korea.) COL Ashyrov noted the good level of bilateral cooperation, in

particular in providing humanitarian support to Afghanistan and through CENTCOM's annual military contact plan. He closed by expressing thanks for the training of their military personnel in the United States through the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program, and was certain cooperation would broaden in the future.

13. (C) LTG Whitcomb expressed condolences on the death of former President Niyazov and wished President Berdimuhammedov well as the new leader of Turkmenistan. He stated that we shared a mutual enemy who were terrorists and extremists that threaten our governments and our way of life.

LTG Whitcomb thanked the government and Ministry of Defense for its cooperation on the refueling of U.S. planes in Ashgabat and permission for the emergency landing of U.S. military aircraft in Mary. He emphasized that their assistance was important to our operations in Afghanistan and hoped we would be able to develop mutually beneficial operating procedures in support of the pending Mary divert agreement.

14. (C) LTG Whitcomb added that Turkmenistan had a unique opportunity right now in developing relations with other countries. Turkmenistan was not just experiencing a military transition, but also an economic and political transition. This was a new stage for Turkmenistan and the country had tremendous opportunities for the future. Relations with Russia were part of Turkmenistan's history and were important, but Turkmenistan was at a point where it could pick and chose what Russia, the United States, and other countries had to offer their military.

15. (C) LTG Whitcomb offered to assist the Turkmenistan Armed Forces, noting the U.S. military had expertise and experience in many areas - including disaster response, but that

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Turkmenistan must identify what its needs were. COL Ashyrov thanked LTG Whitcomb for the offer and said that he would pass it to the Defense Minister as soon as he returned.

16. (C) At the request of COL Ashyrov, LTG Whitcomb described the situation in Afghanistan as 'stable and stabilizing,' and said Turkmenistan's export of electricity to Afghanistan was very beneficial. He noted the opening of the Imam Nazar border check point offered Turkmenistan yet another opportunity to help its neighbor. He then said the narcotics trade was a problem for many countries, not just Afghanistan, and that is why open dialogue was important. LTG Whitcomb pointed out that the Land Forces Symposium recently held in Pakistan, was one such forum in which Army leaders from across CENTCOM's AOR were able to talk openly about similar problems that commonly affect all their countries, and encouraged Turkmenistan to participate again as they had last year.

17. (C) LTG Whitcomb then addressed recent Russian black press on U.S. plans to invade Iran by stating that the United States was not planning any invasion. He emphasized the United States, as well as all countries including Iran's neighbor Turkmenistan, should be concerned about Iran's actions with regard to their nuclear program and the words they were using. LTG Whitcomb added it would be a mistake for Iran to think the U.S. military was overextended.

18. (C) Responding to the question of "what keeps him awake at night" in his position as deputy defense minister, COL Ashyrov said he was entrusted with maintaining peace for Turkmenistan, but that with the difficult situation in Afghanistan and Iran's production of weapons of mass destruction it was difficult to sleep.

19. (C) COL Ashyrov then continued off-script with a brief description of the composition of Turkmenistan's Armed Forces and stated the military was capable of defending its country, which would be demonstrated at a field exercise at Keleta

Training Area on 4 May. He said Turkmenistan was also in the process of modernizing and buying new armaments, to include considering the purchase of the S-400 anti-aircraft system from Russia - which would only be used for defensive purposes. He added Turkmenistan already had sufficient numbers of tanks and cannons left over from the Soviet era.

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

¶9. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Wepa Hajiyeu said LTG Whitcomb's visits were already a nice tradition for the government and that it was a good opportunity to discuss various aspects of our political-military cooperation and look at problematic areas and how to resolve them. Hajiyeu expressed appreciation for the beneficial events within the military contact program, courses, and seminars their officials were able to attend. He described Turkmenistan's support to U.S. humanitarian assistance (overflights) and the refueling operation in support of operations in Afghanistan as productive. He affirmed Turkmenistan would continue to work with the United States in a constructive manner.

¶10. (C) Hajiyeu stated the fight against drugs and organized crime was an urgent problem and that our cooperation had yielded good results. Strengthening of the border with the construction of border crossing stations, specifically at Imam Nazar on the Afghan border, was also a good aspect of our relationship. He went on to say the posting of a defense attach to Washington was a sign of the importance

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Turkmenistan places on its relations with the United States.

¶11. (C) LTG Whitcomb again offered condolences on Niyazov's passing, but said this was an exciting time and opportunity for the new administration to shape the future of the country, despite living in a "rough neighborhood." He thanked Hajiyeu for Turkmenistan's support to the refueling operation in Ashgabat, the Mary divert agreement, and Turkmenistan's provision of electricity and debt relief for Afghanistan. He reiterated the need for the Ministry of Defense to identify its needs so that we could focus our cooperation on these important areas. He said ARCENT's last event here, a medical exchange in February, was very successful and there was good dialogue between our medical specialists.

¶12. (C) After LTG Whitcomb described the current situation in Afghanistan, Hajiyeu gave his own views on developments there. He said expanding the central government's control to the regions by including influential regional leaders was successful because it had weakened their role as warlords and strengthened their role as government officials. On the other hand, the appointment of officials to regions, who were from a different ethnic group than the local populace, had resulted in justifiable criticism of President Karzai. Hajiyeu also pointed out that there was rampant corruption and misuse of international aid in Afghanistan.

¶13. (C) Deflecting a request to talk about Russia due to time constraints, Hajiyeu then asked about the location and activity of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in Afghanistan. LTG Whitcomb noted a combination of coalition operations and a local ground swell against foreigners within Waziristan had achieved some success in moving them out of their traditional areas, but their whereabouts and strength remained largely unknown. On Iran, Hajiyeu simply said working through the UN was the correct route to take.

COMMENT

¶14. (C) Although unable to meet with the Ministers of Foreign

Affairs and Defense due to their abrupt trip to Moscow, LTG Whitcomb's visit was worthwhile in advancing several important messages. The meetings covered no new ground, but provided LTG Whitcomb the opportunity to stress that Turkmenistan was at a decision point with regard to developing its armed forces and that the U.S. military was standing by to assist in areas important to them. Deputy Defense Minister Ashyrov appeared to reveal too much in discussing a possible S-400 air defense system purchase, while Deputy Foreign Minister Hajiyeu - a Farsi speaker and Middle East Department chief up until a few months ago - was prepared to talk about the general features of bilateral cooperation, but seemed more interested in demonstrating his knowledge of Afghanistan's internal dynamics.

End Comment.

BRUSH